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# **Assembly California Legislature**



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As someone very opposed to the proposal, I strongly believe that our only chance to prevent the facility from being built is for our community to remain united in our efforts. With many of you having recently called my office to inquire about new developments, I wanted to pass along some more information and directly provide you with an update.

Last week, a few elected officials representing Ventura County met with Federal Receiver, J. Clark Kelso and several of his staff members. This meeting was attended by District Attorney Greg Totten, Supervisor Kathy Long, Undersheriff Craig Husband and me.

As a group and as elected officials, we expressed our opposition to the prison facility, as well as the entire community's strong sentiments against siting a medical prison at the Ventura School location. We also communicated the significant and thoughtful concerns that had been raised by Ventura County residents in town hall meetings and extensive correspondence.

Below, I have laid out the main points of the questions we asked and the response from the Receiver and his team.

## California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

Mr. Kelso mentioned that he is considering starting the CEQA process in mid-August. He said that he anticipates his team to complete the CEQA process by the end of autumn. While he is under no obligation to abide by the CEQA process, he said that he would. The CEQA process will address all environmental impacts, including the Wright Road fault line, concerns with Valley Fever, water, sewer, energy, traffic, lighting and air quality. Mr. Kelso said he is willing to mitigate any impacts identified in the CEQA process.

## The CYA Facility

According to the Department of Corrections, there is currently no plan to relocate the existing wards at the Ventura Youth Correctional Facility, but Mr. Kelso is confident that the Department of Corrections can find sufficient accommodations for the male wards in the near future at other existing CYA sites. The remaining female wards are a very difficult population to serve, and it is anticipated that counties would have difficulty meeting the myriad of needs of this group. The Ventura County CYA is the only facility in the state that houses female wards, and as such, a solution has not yet been fully vetted to address the housing, program and service needs for this population, according to the Receiver.

## Staffing

According to the Receiver's office, staffing for this facility is estimated to be around 700 correctional officers and 700 medical personnel.

## Inmate Population

The proposed facility would house all levels of offenders from the lowest to the highest, according to the Receiver. The Receiver's team did specify, however, that several groups of inmates would be excluded – Sexually Violent Predators, those Not Guilty By Reason of Insanity, those who were Incompetent to Stand Trial, and Mentally Disordered Offenders.

### Loss of Medical Personnel to the Public Sector

When we expressed our concern about pulling medical professionals away from the private sector to staff the prison hospital, his team mentioned that they were looking to partner with local community colleges to create nursing programs. Mr. Kelso also insisted that they would be conducting a nationwide recruitment program.

### Appearance

The design of the facility is still in development but Mr. Kelso's team envisions a one-story "residential style" campus with a guard tower at the entrance.

### Public Safety

Mr. Kelso likened the prison hospital more to a "skilled nursing facility", rather than a hospital. The Receiver said that no surgeries or procedures would be done on-site at the prison, but that local hospitals would be utilized to meet this need. We expressed concern about the shortage of emergency room beds that already exists and the safety of the public while these inmates receive hospital care. A possible solution his team has identified suggested that a secure wing could be added to existing local hospitals to treat inmates and ensure public safety.

### Impact on Local Law Enforcement

We also expressed concerns regarding the impact this facility would have on local law enforcement as prisoners are transported to and from the prison to other areas of the state, as well as to local hospitals. Additionally, we raised the point that there would be increased burdens on our jails and courts, when inmates at the prison commit crimes while incarcerated and have to be held in jail and await trial.

Lastly, Mr. Kelso mentioned that the prison medical and mental health care system will remain under his jurisdiction until he feels his job is done. At that point, the Receiver anticipates that the medical and mental health prison facilities would be turned over to the Administration under a new, and as-of-yet undetermined agency, and not be overseen by the Department of Corrections.

Overall, the Receiver believes that many of the issues that our community has brought to his attention can be mitigated. Mr. Kelso feels that environmental impacts, medical staffing shortages and local law enforcement issues can and will be addressed in a way that will sufficiently alleviate our community's concerns.

This is only the beginning of the dialogue between our community and the Receiver. Certainly there are many other issues to be discussed as well. Although he has not committed to a specific date to come to Ventura County to meet with us, Mr. Kelso has said that he is willing to do so.

In the meantime, we have requested that Mr. Kelso slow down the siting process for this facility, allowing for increased communications between our community and the Receiver's office and a full vetting of all of the issues and their impacts on Ventura County.

Again, it is my strong personal belief that we must remain united as a community in order to successfully prevent the most violent and dangerous prisoners from being housed in the midst of our community. I know that there are many individuals and groups that are exploring the possible avenues for delaying or stopping the construction of this prison facility. Only with a united effort can we make a difference in this fight.